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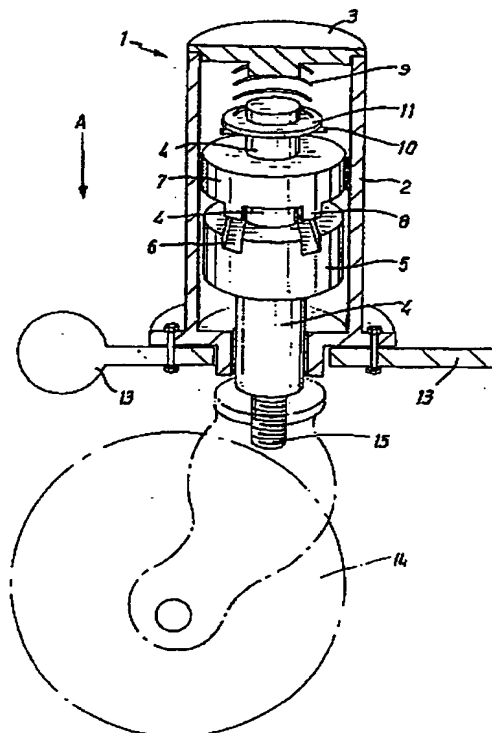
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(54) Title: STEERING UNIT

(57) Abstract

A steering unit (1) for a trolley (12) comprises a first member attached to the chassis (13) of the trolley (12) and a second member attached to a wheel (14) of the trolley (12) and locking means (7) and (5) which lock the second member, and so the wheel (14), in a predetermined position to allow the trolley (12) to be steered with ease.



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1 "Steering Unit"

2

3 This invention relates to a steering unit.

4

5 A number of factors are considered in the design of
6 shopping trolleys such as: trolley width in relation
7 to aisle width, trolley stacking ability, normal
8 ergonomic considerations and overall manoeuvrability.
9 Unfortunately, the vast majority of trolleys do not
10 manoeuvre with the ease and accuracy required by users.
11 Even a trolley which, when unladen, functions as the
12 user requires can become extremely difficult to operate
13 when heavily laden. This is a particular problem when
14 a trolley is taken across even the shallowest of
15 slopes, normally on the way to car parks, where any
16 sideway movement of the trolley can build in momentum
17 resulting, in some cases, in the user losing complete
18 control of the trolley.

19

20 According to the present invention there is provided a
21 a steering unit for a trolley, comprising first and
22 second members, said first member adapted to be fixed
23 on the trolley, said second member attachable to a
24 wheel of the trolley and connected to said first member
25 for rotation with respect to said first member, and

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1 means provided to lock the two members in a
2 predetermined position under load.

3
4 Preferably, said second member is at least partially
5 rotatable within said first member.

6
7 Preferably, said predetermined position is determined
8 by the two members being shaped to interlock in said
9 predetermined position.

10

11 Preferably, said first member comprises a hollow
12 casing, attachable at one end to the trolley chassis
13 and sealed at the other end to form a receptacle for
14 the second member. Preferably, the casing is sealed
15 with a releasable cap, the cap enabling access to the
16 interior of the casing.

17

18 Preferably, said second member comprises a longitudinal
19 member spring-loaded to bear against the first member
20 when under load.

21

22 Preferably, the longitudinal member has a flange
23 mounted upon it, said flange having grooves which are
24 shaped to fit dogs provided on the receptacle, and so
25 interlock the first and second members when engaged.

26

27 The longitudinal member may be spring-loaded by a
28 helical spring attached to the sealed end of the
29 receptacle and bearing against the longitudinal member.

30

31 Alternatively, the longitudinal member may be
32 spring-loaded by a disc spring or a series of disc
33 springs attached to the sealed end of the receptacle
34 and bearing against the longitudinal member.

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1 Most preferably, the position of the second member,
2 once interlocked with the first member, ensures that
3 the wheel to which the second member is attached is
4 directed to run in a forward direction.

5
6 The trolley on which the steering unit is used may also
7 have a shaped handle which extends across the rear of
8 the trolley in a continuous curve and is positioned at
9 an angle and distance that allows the standard stacking
10 of such trolleys.

11
12 Preferably, an external force of approximately ten
13 pounds is sufficient to overcome the repulsive force of
14 the spring and cause the locking mechanism to contact
15 the locating barrel.

16
17 An embodiment of the present invention will now be
18 described, by way of example, with reference to the
19 accompanying drawings in which:-

20
21 Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a steering
22 unit in accordance with the present invention,
23 attached to a trolley wheel;
24 Fig. 2 is a side view of the integral piston
25 rod and locating barrel and the locking
26 mechanism of the steering unit of Fig. 1;
27 Fig. 3 is a side view of a unidirectional
28 piston rod and locating barrel and the locking
29 mechanism of the steering unit of Fig. 1; and
30 Fig. 4 is a perspective view of a trolley with
31 steering units of the present invention attached.

32
33 A steering unit 1 comprises a first member in the form
34 of a casing 2, releasable cap 3, a second member
35 provided as a longitudinal member in the form of a

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1 centrally mounted piston rod 4 housed within the casing
2 2, and locking means provided as a flange 5 with
3 grooves 6, which may be interlocked with a collar 7
4 that has dogs 8 provided for this purpose.

5
6 A repulsive force in direction A is generated by a
7 spring 9 located at the top of the piston rod 4. The
8 piston rod 4 is secured in position above the collar 7
9 by a locking pin 10. The collar 7 is fixed to the
10 casing 2.

11
12 A washer 11 is located above the locking pin 10, and
13 the spring 9 acts between the washer 11 and the cap 3
14 attached to the top of the casing 2.

15
16 The spring 9 is shown in Fig. 1 as a coil spring, but
17 this may be replaced by a disc spring or stack of disc
18 springs which can fulfil the same function but reduces
19 the overall length.

20
21 When in use, the casing 2 is bolted to the front of a
22 shopping trolley 12 on its chassis 13, and a front
23 wheel 14 of the trolley 12 is attached to a threaded
24 section 15 at the base of the piston rod 4.

25
26 The trolley wheel 14 will swivel as normal when the
27 trolley 12 is empty. However, when the weight of the
28 load in the trolley 12 overcomes a predetermined value
29 the force produced by the load will exceed the
30 repulsive force produced by the spring 9 and the
31 chassis 13 of the trolley 12 will lower, thus lowering
32 the collar 7 onto the flange 5. This can occur
33 irrespective of the position of the wheel 14 and
34 consequent position of the attached flange 5, but when
35 the wheel 14 is located in the forward or backward

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1 direction, dogs 8 on the collar 7 and grooves 6 in the
2 flange 5 will be aligned and mate, thus locking the
3 flange 5 in position and locking the wheel 14 in a
4 position to roll forwards or backwards.

5
6 The symmetrical dog 8 and groove 6 arrangement
7 illustrated in Fig. 2 enables the wheel 14 to be locked
8 in a forward or a backward direction with respect to
9 the trolley chassis 13, separated by 180°, whereas the
10 asymmetric positioning of the dogs 8 and grooves 6
11 illustrated in Fig. 3 enables the wheel 14 to be locked
12 only in the forward travel direction, with respect to
13 the trolley chassis 13, where the majority of the wheel
14 14 is positioned behind the piston rod 4.

15
16 Thus the trolley 12 will be compelled to move forward,
17 under a user's direction, and will not move at a
18 tangent under the laden trolley's own momentum, even
19 when traversing very steep slopes.

20
21 Two steering units 1 are shown attached to the chassis
22 13 of a trolley 12 in Fig. 4. The trolley 12 has a
23 handle 16 which is a continuous curve. The distance to
24 which the handle 16 extends from the body of the
25 trolley is limited to a size suitable to allow stacking
26 of such trolleys end-to-end in the usual linear
27 fashion.

28
29 When loaded, the weight of the trolley 12 bears upon
30 the steering unit 1 and the wheels 14 swivel with the
31 piston rod 4, until the grooves 6 engage the dogs 8 to
32 fix the wheels 14 in a forward position.

33
34 The locked wheel 14 will not deviate from the desired
35 direction by more than one degree. However, should the

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1 user wish to release the locked wheel 14, this can be
2 accomplished simply by raising the front of the trolley
3 12 or pressing down on the trolley handle 16 which is
4 to the rear of the chassis 8, so that the front of the
5 trolley 12 is raised slightly, thus separating the
6 collar 7 and flange 5. Similarly, the wheels 14 unlock
7 when the front of the laden trolley 12 is "snatched"
8 sideways.

9
10 The steering unit 1 may be manufactured in any suitable
11 material such as metals or plastics or any combination
12 of these as desired.

13
14 The operating handle 16 of the trolley 12 with the
15 steering unit 1 attached is curved to aid steering of
16 the trolley and is more comfortable to use by being
17 ergonomically suitable.

18
19 Modifications and improvements may be incorporated
20 without departing from the scope of the invention.

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1 CLAIMS:

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3 1. A steering unit for a trolley, comprising first and
4 second members, said first member adapted to be fixed
5 on the trolley, said second member attachable to a
6 wheel of the trolley and connected to said first member
7 for rotation with respect to said first member, and
8 means provided to lock the two members in a
9 predetermined position under load.

10

11 2. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in Claim
12 1, wherein said second member is at least partially
13 rotatable within said first member.

14

15 3. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in Claims
16 1 or 2, wherein said predetermined position is
17 determined by the two members being shaped to interlock
18 in said predetermined position.

19

20 4. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in any one
21 of Claims 1 to 3, wherein said first member comprises a
22 hollow casing, attachable at one end to the trolley
23 chassis and sealed at the other end to form a
24 receptacle for the second member.

25

26 5. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in Claims
27 1 to 4, wherein said second member comprises a
28 longitudinal member spring-loaded to bear against the
29 first member when under load.

30

31 6. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in Claim
32 5, wherein the longitudinal member has a flange mounted
33 upon it, said flange having grooves which are shaped to
34 fit dogs provided on the receptacle, and so interlock
35 the first and second members when engaged.

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1 7. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in Claim
2 5, wherein the longitudinal member is spring-loaded by
3 a helical spring attached to the sealed end of the
4 receptacle and bearing against the longitudinal member.

5
6 8. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in Claim
7 5, wherein the longitudinal member is spring-loaded by
8 a disc spring attached to the sealed end of the
9 receptacle and bearing against the longitudinal member.

10
11 9. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in any one
12 of Claims 4 to 8, wherein the casing is sealed by a
13 releasable cap to provide access to the interior of the
14 casing.

15
16 10. A steering unit for a trolley as claimed in any
17 preceding Claim, wherein the position of the second
18 member, once interlocked with the first member, ensures
19 that the wheel to which the second member is attached
20 is directed to run in a forward direction.

21
22 11. A trolley comprising a chassis and handle and front
23 wheels each having a steering unit as defined in any
24 preceding Claim.

25
26 12. A trolley as claimed in Claim 10, wherein the
27 handle extends across the rear of the trolley in a
28 continuous curve and is positioned at an angle and
29 distance which allows the standard stacking of such
30 trolleys.

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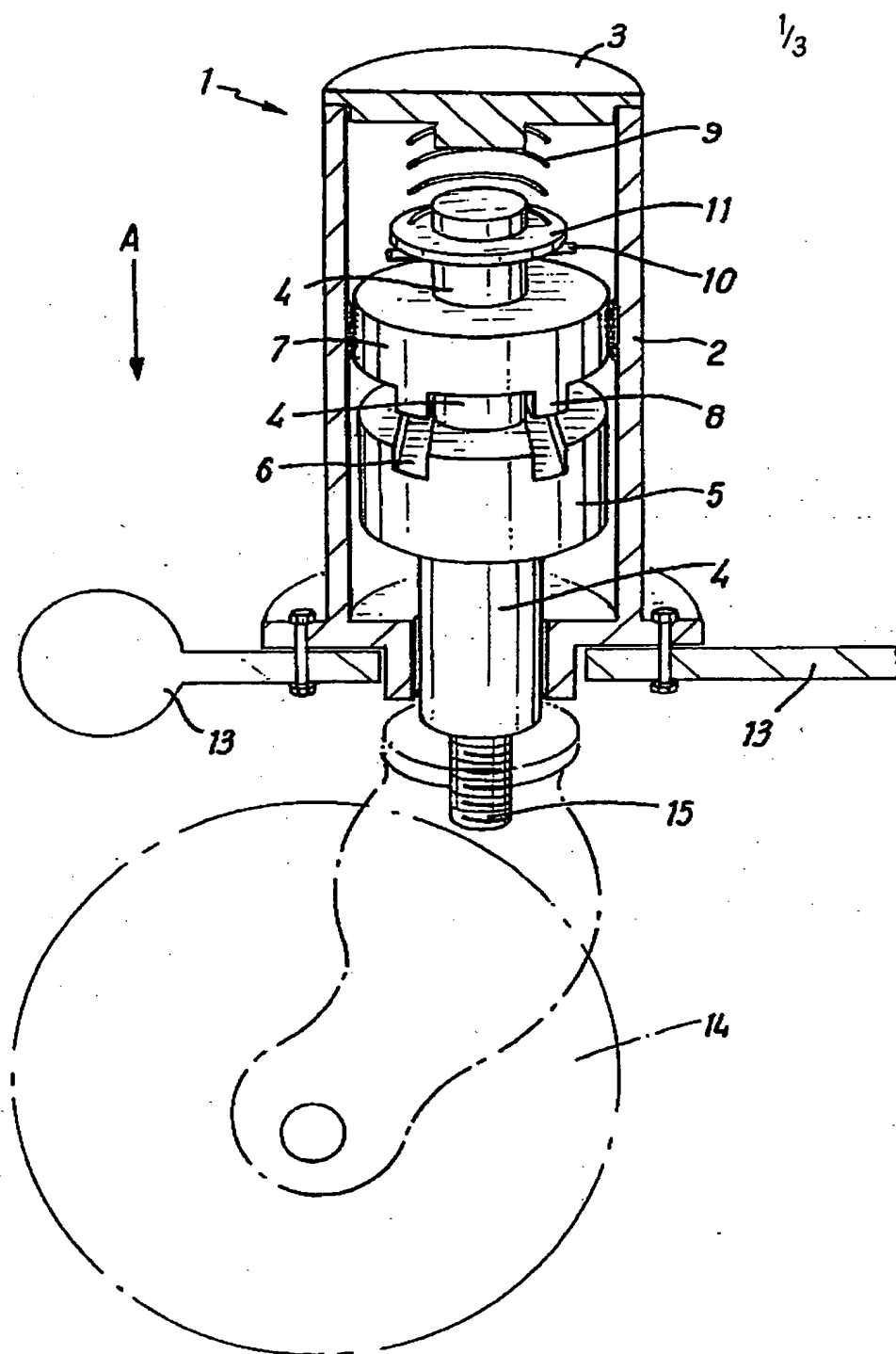


Fig. 1

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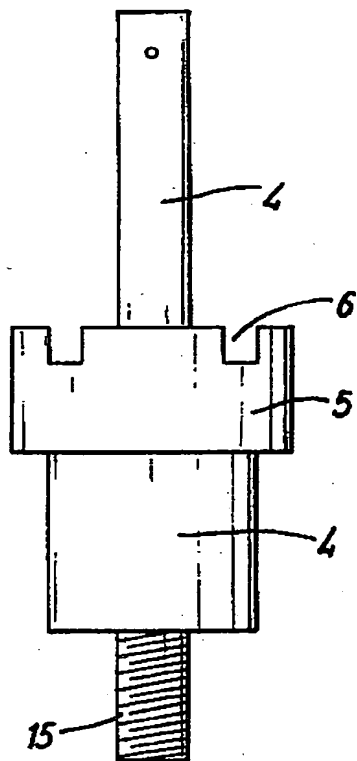
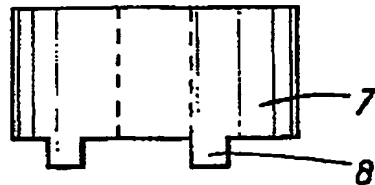
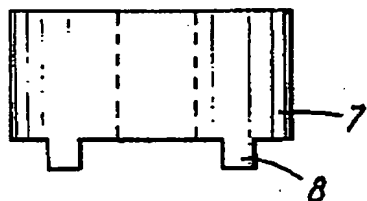


FIG. 2

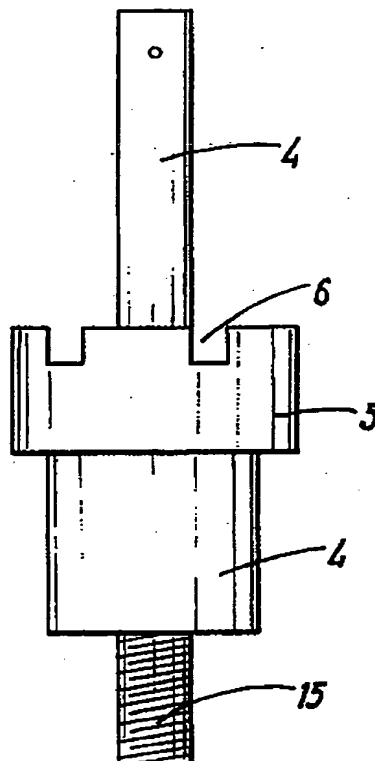


FIG. 3

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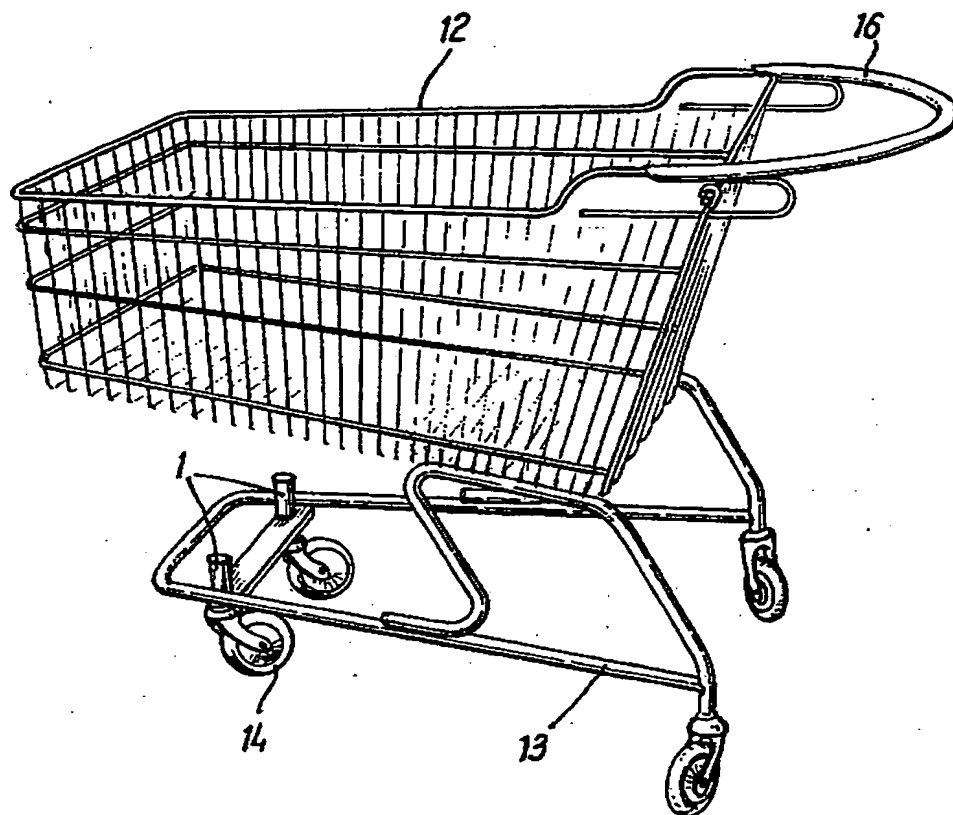


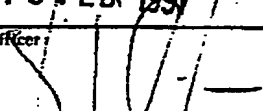
FIG. 4

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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International Application No

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ⁶		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC		
Int.Cl. 5 B60B33/02		
II. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum Documentation Searched ⁷		
Classification System	Classification Symbols	
Int.Cl. 5	B60B ; B62B	
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III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT⁹		
Category ¹⁰	Citation of Document, ¹¹ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹²	Relevant to Claim No. ¹³
A	DE,A,2847957 (WANZL) 22 May 1980 see page 6, lines 4 - 20 see page 8, lines 1 - 30; figure 1 ---	1, 6, 10
A	US,A,1861919 (HILL) 07 June 1932 see page 1, line 91 - page 2, line 39; figures 1-4 ---	1
A	US,A,4731899 (HUANG) 22 March 1988 see column 3, lines 1 - 38; figures 1-5 ---	1
A	FR,A,2580551 (BLAIN) 24 October 1986 see page 2, line 25 - page 3, line 32; figures 1-3 ---	1
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**ANNEX TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
DE-A-2847957	22-05-80	None	
US-A-1861919		None	
US-A-4731899	22-03-88	None	
FR-A-2580551	24-10-86	None	

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